UMass Lowell Climbs Again in U.S. News & World Report Ranking

UMass Lowell is in the top tier of universities in the nation for the fourth consecutive time, climbing a dozen spots since last year and 25 since 2011 in U.S. News & World Report's annual ranking of institutions of higher education. The three-year climb is the second-largest jump among all universities.

U.S. News & World Report's annual lists, which study more than 1,500 U.S. four-year colleges and universities, are considered among the most influential for parents and prospective students in selecting a school. UMass Lowell is No. 158 on the 2014 list of Best National Universities, up from 170 last year. In just three years, the University has climbed 25 spots in this ranking and continues to be among the top 100 public universities in the nation. In determining the annual ranking, U.S. News & World Report looked at criteria such as the breadth of programs offered and the institution's reputation among academic peers. Also considered were retention rates (approximately 84 percent of UMass Lowell freshmen continue on for their sophomore year) and alumni giving (UMass Lowell recently logged its third-consecutive record year for fundraising).

"Just four years ago, UMass Lowell was ranked for the first time in the top tier of national universities," says UMass Lowell Chancellor Marty Meehan. "For that ranking to climb 25 places in just a few years is a testament to the work that has been done by faculty, staff and administrators to turn this institution into a world-class university."

UMass Lowell has recently earned top honors in other national, independent rankings based on factors like quality and graduates' return on investment, including being named No. 10 on Forbes magazine's 25 Best Value Colleges for this year and as the "Most Underrated College in America" by Business Insider. PayScale.com and Affordable Colleges Online also recognized UMass Lowell for return on investment (ROI). PayScale ranks the University No. 10 among public colleges and universities and No. 50 among private and public institutions, noting that UMass Lowell is one of just 75 in the nation whose graduates have a 30-year net ROI of more than $1 million.
Not Your Average Summer Job

Students Explore Career Options Through Internships, Jobs

Many students returned to campus this fall with new skills and perspectives developed at professional internships, co-op positions and jobs held over summer break, including those engaged in the University’s Co-Op Scholars Program.

Across all majors, students had the opportunity to apply what they’ve learned in classes while exploring career options. They conducted research and developed social media plans. They donned hard hats for civil engineering jobs and suits for legislative internships. Some found opportunities in campus labs while others traveled to Washington, D.C., and as far as Australia.

“I got so much out of the experience,” says Kristie Michta, a sophomore chemistry major who had a summer co-op job at the U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development & Engineering Center. “Besides the experience of working in a professional lab, I learned how to set up and design my own experiments. I also learned how to collaborate with other people and I developed my oral presentation skills.”

“We see a positive correlation between internships and co-op experiences and student success in receiving job offers upon graduation,” says Martina Wiggs, assistant director of cooperative education in the University’s Career Services and Cooperative Education Center.

Sixty-four sophomores from all six colleges on campus presented their work in 44 posters during this year’s Summer Co-op Scholars Poster Session.

“At UMass Lowell, we engage students early in their college careers, urging them to participate in meaningful, practical experiences that enrich learning and prepare them for work, life and the world,” says Prof. Julie Chen, vice provost for research.

NSF Funds Ultrasonic Research

Study Will Help Analyze Dynamic Properties of Small Structures

The National Science Foundation has awarded a three-year, $500,000 grant to a team of researchers from UMass Lowell and Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn., to study the use of focused ultrasonic radiated force to make tiny structures vibrate. The technique will help determine the structures’ dynamic characteristics without actually touching them.

Applications of this new method include the testing of devices that normally operate in air—such as the small, thumbnail-size turbine blades in jet aircraft engines and the reeds in church organs—as well as other devices that normally operate submerged in fluid—such as heart valves and the propellers in naval ships and submarines.

“This work is extremely important in understanding how very small, very lightweight structures behave dynamically at very high frequencies,” says mechanical engineering Prof. Peter Avitabile, who is the principal investigator for the UMass Lowell group.

Sophomore chemistry major Kristie Michta conducted experiments during her summer co-op job at the U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development & Engineering Center.

Learning with Purpose
How Suite It Is: New Residence Hall Opening Celebrated

On Sept. 19, UMass Lowell celebrated the opening of University Suites, a $54 million residence hall that is drawing rave reviews from students for its cutting-edge design, amenities and positive impact on campus life. It is the sixth new building UMass Lowell has opened in the last year. Located at 327 Aiken St. in the heart of UMass Lowell’s East Campus, the 148,000-square-foot, five-story University Suites is home to 472 students and represents a new housing model that includes 88 four- and six-bed suites that feature living rooms, bedrooms, kitchenettes and bathrooms; eight common lounge areas with flat-screen TVs, couches and full kitchens; a glass-fronted living room with a fireplace; the Hawk’s Nest Café, which is open to students and the public, and other amenities.

Breaking Bad: The Dilemma of Baseball Bats

University’s Baseball Research Lab Featured in National Geographic

Pity the poor baseball bat. “A 90-miles-per-hour pitch impacting a bat swinging at 70 miles per hour can exert a force greater than 8,000 pounds,” says Patrick Drane, assistant director of the University’s Baseball Research Center. “This peak force is exerted for a small fraction of the 1,000th of a second that the ball and bat are in contact,” explains Drane. “When the ball impacts away from the bat’s ‘sweet spot,’ much of the energy goes into vibrating the bat. These vibrations can cause even the strongest woods to break.”

The Baseball Research Center—featured in an article in National Geographic’s September issue—has been studying the durability of wood bats for Major League Baseball for more than five years. According to the National Geographic article, major leaguers broke 1,697 bats between July and September 2012. Part of the problem has to do with the kind of wood used in making the bats, with more players preferring maple over ash. As maple bats increased in popularity, the number of bats splintering into multiple pieces was perceived to increase, so the MLB began studying ways to improve the bats’ durability. “Strict grading of the wood, along with inspection, training and other regulations, has been implemented over the past five years and has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of multi-piece failures that occur during games,” says Drane.

Meryl Streep to Speak at UMass Lowell

**Legendary Actress to Present Program for Public, Campus**

Meryl Streep, considered by many to be the greatest actress of this generation, will speak at UMass Lowell in the latest installment of the Chancellor’s Speaker Series. Streep, an Academy Award winner whose acting career has spanned five decades and more than 100 roles, will take the stage at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell on Wednesday, Feb. 5, 2014. Details on the program and tickets, which will be available to the public as well as the University community, will be announced at a later date. Check www.uml.edu/streep for updates.

The UMass Lowell Chancellor’s Speaker Series was launched last December with “A Conversation With Stephen King,” which drew a capacity crowd of more than 3,000. As with the King event, Streep’s program will benefit student scholarships. It is co-sponsored by the UMass Lowell English Department’s Theatre Arts Program and the College of Fine Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

“We are grateful to have someone of Meryl Streep’s stature as the next participant in the UMass Lowell Chancellor’s Speaker Series, which brings people at the top of their fields to the University to speak to students and the community while helping to raise funds for scholarships,” says Chancellor Marty Meehan.

Skinny wooden bats used in Major League Baseball have to withstand up to 8,000 pounds of force when they make contact with the ball.
2,750 New Students Begin School With Inspiration

The University community welcomed 2,750 new students with fun events and introductions to college life, but also with a challenge: make a difference.

Between moving in to new residence halls, meeting classmates and playing games of dodge ball, first-year and transfer students got a fast introduction to the University’s can-do attitude from people who have chased a dream and won.

The DifferenceMakers program sparked the entrepreneurial spirit by inviting Johnny Earle, better known as “Johnny Cupcakes,” to campus to speak about his apparel company. Earle started his company in 2001, selling T-shirts out of his car trunk. In 2008, he was named the top Entrepreneur Under 25 by Bloomberg Business.

Earle designed a custom shirt for students featuring Rowdy the River Hawk, his first partnership with a college.

Founded last year, DifferenceMakers has already awarded $25,000 in seed money to student teams who use fresh ideas and hard work to address contemporary business and social challenges.

Inspiration continued at the new student convocation with the theme “Create your legacy. Make a difference.” Olympic gold medalist and political and social activist Waneek Horn-Miller, from the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory near Montreal, encouraged students to take advantage of the many possibilities ahead.

Student government President Andrew Ladd dared everyone to get involved on campus, even if it requires stepping out of his or her comfort zone.

“If you wake up and you’re not terrified and excited, you’re not taking advantage of all the University has to offer,” he said.

New students were ready for the challenge. Almira Rosso, a first-year English major from Worcester, expressed interested in the ballroom dance club at the student activities fair and said she was anxious to start classes.

“Everyone’s been really nice and open to meeting new people,” said Rosso. “I’m really looking forward to taking classes I’ve chosen instead of just taking what’s required, like in high school.”

Her friend Jessica Herrera, a first-year psychology student from Boston, said the opening events were giving her a good sense of life on campus. Being in the Tsongas Center for convocation had her thinking ahead a few weeks.

“I really want to see a hockey game here and see what the buzz is about,” she said.

With attendance and enthusiasm high at opening events, faculty and staff were looking forward to getting to know the new students.

“I think we are seeing the most engaged class ever,” said Tasha Baclawski, associate director of the Office of Student Activities and Leadership.

“Student leaders were excited by the turnout at the club fair and how many new people showed interest in joining their organizations. Also, we’re hearing more questions from incoming students about involvement, opportunities and events. I think this is setting a tone of increasing engagement, enthusiasm and spirit on campus.”

New community members also had a funny look at college life with rising comedian Amy Schumer’s appearance at Lowell Memorial Auditorium, an event organized by students in the Campus Activities Programming Association.